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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [KPKO](#) [XI](#) [UN](#)
SUBJECT: (U) ASSISTANT SECRETARY WELCH'S SEPTEMBER 28,
2007 MEETING WITH MOROCCAN FOREIGN MINISTER BENAISSA

Classified By: NEA A/S David Welch. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) September 28, 2007, 3:00 p.m., New York.

[1](#)2. (U) Participants:

United States
A/S David Welch, NEA
Randall Kaailau, NEA/MAG (note taker)

Morocco
FM Mohamed Benaissa
Amb. El Mustafa Sahel, Ambassador to the United Nations
Amb. Youssef Amrani, DG of Bilateral Relations
Mr. Nasser Bourita, Dir., Int'l Org. Directorate

[1](#)3. (SBU) Summary: On September 28, Assistant Secretary Welch and Moroccan Foreign Minister Mohammed Benaissa discussed the Middle East peace process, terrorism in the Maghreb, and next steps on the Western Sahara. End Summary.

Middle East Peace Process

[1](#)4. (S) Benaissa expressed interest in preparations for the upcoming international meeting on the Middle East, asking whether the Saudis had received enough assurances to secure their attendance and what role Hamas would play. Welch said that the Saudis wanted more information on the timetable and would push for President Bush to play a role. He noted the Hamas leadership's tenuous control over its people and suggested they might become spoilers if the conference succeeds in constructing a plan that provides real benefits to the Palestinians.

[1](#)5. (S) Regarding the Israelis, Benaissa stressed that peace could not be discussed unless the spread of settlements was halted. He related that Foreign Minister Livni had told him that she was ready to do so, but could not cease construction of the security barrier. Welch assured Benaissa that the United States considered the settlement issue to be part of Israel's roadmap obligations, while we would press the Palestinians to continue dismantling terrorist infrastructure. Benaissa confirmed the Moroccan King's commitment to the peace process and his desire to be helpful in any way that would be acceptable to the Palestinian people.

Responding to Terrorism in the Maghreb

¶6. (C) Benaissa said the Government of Morocco (GOM) is "deeply concerned" about terrorism in the region, which had spread to Libya and Tunisia, and said he felt the Tunisians "understated" their problem. He said that as a result of the GOM's increased alert level last summer, civilians had begun reporting suspicious activities to Moroccan authorities for the first time. He attributed the outcome to the new era in transparency ushered in by the King, where wrongdoing of all kinds was exposed on television, so that "everyone became a policeman" in Morocco.

¶7. (C) Algeria was not as fortunate with public vigilance, Benaissa noted, but letters the King sent to the Algerian Prime Minister after the recent bombings demonstrated Morocco's willingness to open the door to cooperate in the fight against terrorism. However, Benaissa concluded that "what needs to be done is to see progress toward peace." He said that President Bush's UNGA remarks about "a world where Israel and Palestine exist side-by-side," represented a positive step. Additional steps, even those less tangible and more symbolic, would have a positive effect not only in fighting terrorism, but also in reducing conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia.

Morocco's next steps on the Western Sahara

¶8. (C) Welch noted that Britain, France and Spain appear to

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be inclined to support new wording in the Security Council resolution on MINURSO at the end of October, but expressed uncertainty about the prospects for passage of a resolution stating that the Moroccan proposal should be "the basis for negotiations." He said Spain would want to support the principle of self-determination, which Benaissa ascribed to the fact that Spain will have elections next year. Benaissa said that the Polisario had succeeded in making the Western Sahara a central Spanish political issue before the Zapatero government realized it. At the same time, the government understands it has equities in Morocco. Benaissa opined that Spain would need a push from the United States before agreeing to a resolution that more strongly supports the Moroccan proposal. Welch said that the United States would begin pushing its friends within the next two weeks.

¶9. (C) Benaissa said that the GOM would lobby for a process based on UNSCR 1754, and added that the GOM does not want an Algerian-penned resolution referencing the Baker plan to be put forth in the UNGA Fourth Committee. He considered such an effort an Algerian "game" with which the rest of the international community was tired. He claimed that one of his EU counterparts stated that if such language came to a vote in the Fourth Committee, the EU would abstain.

¶10. (C) Benaissa mentioned that he had met with the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Peter

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Van Walsum for about an hour. Van Walsum expressed his belief that the Algerians were "on top" of their efforts and that one day the international community would insist that there will be no solution without Algeria at the table. Benaissa said he admired Van Walsum's frankness.

¶11. (C) Van Walsum also asked the GOM to commit to a date and venue for the next round of talks. Benaissa said that first the new Moroccan government would have to be formed (in about two weeks), the government would have to produce a strategy for the next round, and then Parliament would have to approve it. Benaissa stated that since the Polisario was holding its party conference in December, he did not feel rushed to specify a date. Nevertheless, he said, Morocco is still committed to continued talks, and would be patient despite any obstacles.

